/62 cont./

4. Life Cycle

842 a) Birth control

862 [163] [165] The number of children among both the Surára and the Pakidái is very small; no woman has more than three at most. Aside from the high infant mortality rate as a result of the lack of hygiene, however, this is bound up with the fact that the women must observe an interval of at least three years after each birth, as long as a child is fed with mother's milk, which, in the opinion of these Indians, prevents conception to a considerable extent. If a woman nevertheless becomes pregnant, the medicine men know how to prepare an abortive medicine from plant juices. The reason for birth control, I was told, is that if a child were born during the period of restriction, it would not be healthy and able to cope with life, because the mother's body would still be too weak.

842 847

843 b) Food taboos during pregnancy

Before the birth the mother must observe many food taboos in order not to harm her child. Her diet then consists primarily of the tender meat of the mutum (Crax sp.), cooked bananas, manioc flat-cakes, and a drink that is made from the nourishing, very oily pupunha fruits. If she were to eat wild-pig meat, for example, the child would be born dead; the meat of the pirarucu (Osteoglossidae, the largest fresh-water fish), which carries inside it the bad breath of the river, would make it blind, and parrot meat would make it cry constantly later on.

844 c) Birth

While giving birth, the woman kneels in front of a tree and embraces the trunk with both arms. The ground has been sprinkled with water beforehand so that it is slimy and soft. Several female members of the tribe assist the woman in labor. After the birth, two women, each with a cotton thread, tie off the umbilical cord, and a third one then bites it off. The father

854 514 [123] /64 cont./ If the child's nose is not clean, the mother carefully takes it between her teeth, presses its contents into her mouth, and spits them out. The women found it most unhygienic that I blew my nose into a handkerchief and carried it with me.

856 593 The little Surára and Pakidái learn to walk and talk at the same age as the children of civilization, and they are aided by their parents, siblings, and relatives. The pleasure of the relatives is great and they are overjoyed when the child is able to stand and walk and babble its first words, nápe=mother and hápe=father.

862 e) Name-giving

After the completion of the third year, a new, important period of life begins. The nursing period is ended, and the child, [851] which hitherto belonged to the flesh and blood of the mother (325b), has become an independent human being.

851 846 114 171 842 325b. This idea is very unusual for South American Indians. It should be remembered, however, that among most of the tribes the so-called couvade, the men's childbed, is practiced. Karl von den Steinen, who has examined the psychological basis of this custom, says that in this case the child, whether it be a boy or girl, is "the little father," so to speak, a part of the father, that is, a bit of his body. (K. von den Steinen, 1894, pp. 334 ff.) "The activity of the mother in this connection is compared to that of the soil, which receives the seed." (von Spix and von Martius, 1831, p. 1339.)

000 553 776 [782] has become an independent human being. Now it is also given a name, which is taken from the animal or vegetable kingdom. The name is given to the father, when he offers his prayers in snuff-powder intoxication, by the gigantic animal and plant spirits living on

/451 cont./

251 The Guaika /Waica/ do not keep reserves of food. All of their foods are cooked fresh or at least within a period of two weeks from the time they are ready. Therefore, in case their conucos have a scarcity of produce, they must go to live in the forest, gathering seeds, fruits, and roots, and devoting more [628] time than usual to hunting and fishing. When another settlement has an abundance of food in a time of scarcity, it would be very fortunate to be able to live completely from this settlement instead of having to subsist from the forest.

Consumption of Food

263 No salt is consumed as such, that is, as salt properly speak- [824] ing. They eat wood ashes, especially the ashes of a tree called "kololi." The ashes may be eaten as they are or with hot water poured over them to obtain a tasty liquid. To this liquid, called "ubu," is added strong peppers. Platanos and other foods are dipped in the resulting sauce to flavor and ingest them.

261 Clay is also dried and eaten, especially the clay from certain nests of insects.

• [862] No child may be weaned until it has learned to eat the said ashes and clay.

Earth and clean dust are also eaten. They are considered clean if they are taken from a place where a fire has recently burned, from a river bed, or from a bare spot or bank of sand which the sun has been able to purify.

264 Their hours for eating are as follows: Breakfast is taken shortly after sunrise, and the second turn when they come back from work in their "conucos," generally at some time near mid- /452/ day. They eat again near sunset. This schedule varies, being adjusted for hunting trips, moving from the settlement, etc. They eat quite a lot between meals, especially wild fruits and bananas and ripe platanos.

TABLE 3-3
SEX-RATIO DATA ON SELECTED VILLAGES

	Males	Females	Totals
Upper Bisaasi-teri	37	48	85
Lower Bisaasi-teri	25	26	51
Monou-teri	34	32	66
Reyaboböwei-teri	52	46	98
Mõmariböwei-teri	50	46	96
Patanowä-teri	122	90	212
Aikam-teri and Roko-teri	129	103	232
	449	391	840

Table 3-3 gives sex-ratio data on seven groups of Yąnomamö. The first three villages are not truly representative of the population in general, but are included because they have been frequently discussed in the text.

They are not representative because some 15 men from these villages were killed in a single treacherous feast in 1950, a significant fraction of the adult male population. These feasts are not very frequent. The three groups are allied to each other and have been extremely successful at coercing two neighboring Shamatari villages out of women; a surprisingly high proportion of their women come from these allies. As we shall see, they have been successful because of the geographical and historical relationships that characterize the alliance network in this area.

DEMOGRAPHIC BASIS As is apparent, there are more males in the Yąnomamö population than females. This demographic fact results from the practice of selectively killing female babies: *female infanticide*. The Yąnomamö also practice male infanticide, but because of the preference to have a male as their first child, they unknowingly kill more females than males. The Yąnomamö have only three numbers: one, two, and more-than-two. They are, accordingly, poor statisticians. They are quite unaware of the fact that they do kill more female babies, and every time I questioned them about it, they insisted that they killed both kinds—"more-than-two" of both kinds.

A child is killed at birth, irrespective of its sex, if the mother already has a nursing baby. They rationalize the practice by asserting that the new infant would probably die anyway, since its older sibling would drink most of the milk. They are most reluctant to jeopardize the health and safety of a nursing child by weaning it before it is three years old or so, preferring to kill the competitor instead. Kąobawä's wife, Bahimi, killed a newborn male shortly after I began my fieldwork. She later told me, quite tearfully, that it would have taken milk away from Ariwari, Kąobawä's favorite child. Ariwari at the time was over two years old, but Bahimi refused to wean him. Sometimes a child is killed simply because the mother doesn't feel that she can care for it properly and that it would be an inconvenience to have to tend a baby. I once saw a plump, well-fed, young mother eating a large quantity of food that would have been suitable to give to an older infant. Her emaciated, filthy, and nearly starved child—about two years old—kept reaching out for the food. The mother explained that the baby had gotten a bad case of diarrhea some time ago and had stopped eating. As a consequence, her milk dried up. She refused to attempt to feed it other foods because "it did not know how to eat other foods." When